



King County

Countywide Community Forums

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Countywide Survey Shows Support for Spending Limits, Expansion of Utility and B&O Taxes to Unincorporated Areas

Over 400 citizens weigh-in on taxes and spending for Round 2

Seattle – King County’s *Countywide Community Forums* (CCF) released today survey results from Round 2 of its forums on the budget shortfall and spending priorities. Survey results showed support for public transportation, infrastructure maintenance, spending limits, expansion of the utility and business & occupation (B&O) taxes to unincorporated areas, and opposition to increases in property or sales taxes. To obtain complete survey results and demographic information, go to <http://tinyurl.com/ccf-reports>

Jim Spady, deputy coordinator for CCF, said the report is timely as governments at all levels grapple with spending and tax issues. The report compiles responses from 406 people who either filled out an in-depth survey online, or participated in one of 51 forums organized by volunteers between February 21 and March 22. All participants completed the CCF Budget *Opinionnaire*® titled “**Citizen Priorities for County Government: Budget and Strategic Options**” to provide input on budget priorities, taxes, and strategic options. Unlike random sample polls, the CCF program and survey are open to any interested person living or working in King County.

“This is the heart of what makes this program so valuable,” said Spady. “Most people met in homes, businesses, coffee shops and libraries to talk about the county’s ongoing budget crisis and register their opinions on spending priorities and revenue sources. This program expands the public forum process and gives elected officials one more tool to connect with residents.”

“I am appreciative of the creative budget ideas expressed by the people who participated in the Countywide Community Forums representing all corners of King County,” said Larry Gossett, Chair of King County Council’s Budget and Fiscal Management Committee. “These survey results come at a crucial time as we determine the county’s priorities in light of the economic crisis facing all governments and as we prepare for our difficult deliberations during the fall budget panels. We will consider this citizen input along with other input we receive throughout the year.”

A majority of respondents, 54 percent, agreed that the biggest problem with King County’s current budget situation is that expenditures are growing faster than its revenues with respect to the general fund. When considering different ways to prevent future budget shortfalls, a majority or plurality of respondents believed that King County should:

- Ask the Washington State Legislature to provide King County with more flexibility in how to use existing local taxes – 66 percent.
- Ask the Legislature to allow King County to levy the same taxes on residents of unincorporated areas

that cities have for incorporated areas – 64 percent.

- Avoid any general increase in property taxes or sales taxes – 60 percent.
- Move toward more regional services for criminal justice – 57 percent.
- Look for ways to consolidate or combine programs or functions of county government – 42 percent (the top choice of five options).
- Require employees to take unpaid furlough days to reduce labor costs, assuming that the county's elected leaders determined that additional labor cost reductions are necessary – 34 percent (the top choice of five options).
- Adopt strict limits on the growth of overall county spending – 34 percent (the top choice of five options)

Community Safety – 66 percent of participants feel “safe or very safe” in their communities, while only 8 percent described their community as “unsafe” or “very unsafe.” Moreover a strong majority, 71 percent, felt just as safe or safer today than they did five years ago.

Funding Sources – A clear majority, 59 percent, of participants agree that, “there should be a secure, stable and adequate funding source for health and human services.” However, participants were divided on the best funding source. Only 12 percent support a special property tax levy, another 12 percent a special sales tax levy, 17 percent support dedicating a specific percentage of existing taxes, and 18 percent support a tax increase on something other than property or sales.

A series of questions was asked to gauge residents' general satisfaction with a host of programs offered by King County and other governments in the region. Infrastructure maintenance and public transportation were strong candidates for increased spending, as were, to a lower extent, social safety net, resource and energy conservation, and public health clinics and services.

A majority or plurality of respondents were satisfied with the current level of county funding in the following six areas: disaster preparedness, crime prevention, law enforcement, pollution prevention and, to a lower extent, environmental quality, and preservation of agricultural or environmentally sensitive areas.

Finally, a plurality of respondents wanted to reduce spending on the following three program areas: arts and historic preservation, health and wellness, and new roads.

Since 2007, over 1600 people have registered to serve as volunteer *Citizen Councilors* under the CCF program. CCF is overseen by the King County Auditor's office, uses no taxpayer money and is managed by the volunteer leadership of Dick Spady, co-founder of *Dick's Drive-In Restaurants Inc.*, and his sons Jim and John Spady.

The next opportunity to participate in the Countywide Community Forums will begin in mid-May. To sign up as a volunteer *Citizen Councilor* visit <http://CommunityForums.org/>, call (206) 296-1633 or toll free (800) 369-2584, or email CommunityForums@KingCounty.gov.

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